

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL WANDA GOOD, COMMANDER,
U.S. ARMY HUMAN RESOURCES COMMAND VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
SUBJECT: THE ARMY'S INDIVIDUAL READY RESERVE AND RETIREE RECALLS TIME: 2:30 P.M.
EDT DATE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2008

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, Office of the
Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Colonel Good, I'd like to welcome you
to the Bloggers Roundtable this afternoon, and appreciate you joining us. Do
you have an opening statement for us?

COL. GOOD: Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me. I've never
participated in a Bloggers afternoon, so I'm very excited. And I appreciate the
opportunity to talk with everybody and take questions at the end.

Today, I'd like to discuss the mobilization of Individual Ready Reserve
Soldiers, or IRR Soldiers, and Retired Reserve Soldiers, who we also have on
active duty. Human Resources Command, St. Louis, or, what we refer to as HRC-
St. Louis, is responsible for managing these populations. We provide the
full spectrum of human resources support to these soldiers.

We also call that "Lifecycle Support," and that includes the
mobilization and demobilization services, and, as you know, that's where most of
the interest from the public is in relation to the IRR Soldiers and the role
they play in the global war on terror.

My commander, Major General Sean Byrne spoke to you about the IRR back
in May of this year, and some of you bloggers may have been part of that
roundtable. There were, and are, some misconceptions still about the IRR, and
we really appreciate the role that you play, and have already played, in helping
to get the accurate information out.

I know soldiers, and their families and friends read your blogs, as
well as members of the general public who are interested in military issues.
So, today I want to amplify a couple of General Byrne's remarks; give you some
up-to-date information; and I want to do some myth-busting, if I could, about
the IRR; and then have a question and answer session.

If I could, I'd like to begin by extending our thoughts and prayers to
the families of the 18 IRR soldiers who have been killed in action during the
global war on terror. We will never forget these soldiers who have given their
last full measure.

And, in fact, there is a memorial here to them - at HRC-St. Louis, and it is in the center of our building so that every day people pass by and can pay tribute to each one of these 18 soldiers. That way, we stay keenly aware of the sacrifices made every day by our IRR soldiers in-theatre and their families here at home.

I'd also like to express our profound respect for the 2,218 Retired Reserve soldiers who, since 9/11, have volunteered to come back on active duty. Three-hundred and eighty-four of them served in Iraq, and 122 of them have served in Afghanistan. And we certainly appreciate their dedication and patriotism.

For the benefit of those who weren't present at the May 9th Roundtable with General Byrne, I'm going to quickly recap some facts and then do my myth-busting. As most people know, the U.S. Army has been an all-voluntary force since the 1970s. And when a person volunteers to join, he incurs both a statutory and contractual obligation to serve a certain number of years.

By "statutory," I'm referring to the U.S. Legal Code, Title 10, Section 651, "the Congress established that anyone who enlists will incur an initial military service obligation of no less than six, and no more than eight years." By "contractual," I mean that each recruit signs an individual contract committing himself to eight years. And this eight-year commitment is nothing new, and it was the norm before the events of September 11th. The length of the commitment is clearly stated on the first page of the enlistment contract, which we call a "DD form," Department of Defense Form 4-1. In that enlistment contract it also says, "Any part of that service not served on active duty must be served in the Reserve Component of the Service in which I enlisted." And on that form these soldier initial at every one of these little statements. So, they initial that they read and understood that.

Typically, most soldiers will serve three or four years on active duty and then transfer into the Reserve. The enlistment contract, again, is very clear about the possibility of being recalled to active duty from the Reserve status. So, on the day the soldier enlists, he is aware of this.

He is reminded of his obligation on the day he leaves active duty from the transition point. That's where he receives the infamous "DD Form 214," the Department of Defense 214 which soldiers often refer to as his discharge, when in actuality the title of the document is a "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty."

If the soldier hasn't completed his eight years, he's released from active duty and immediately transferred to a Reserve category, such as the IRR. In Block 6, specifically, on that Form 214, it tells how much time he must serve in the Reserves. Block 18 then specifically states, and I quote, "subject to active duty recall, muster duty and/or annual screening." So, every IRR soldier knows that he has not been discharged from the military. He knows he's been released from the Active Component and transferred to the Reserve Component, not discharged.

He also knows that he's in the Reserve and that he may be mobilized out of this Reserve. He knows the length of time he must serve until he has completed his obligation and is eligible for discharge from the military. His enlistment contract and the DD-214 clearly state his obligation and status. IRR soldiers know they are not civilians being drafted.

Right now our force is about 65,000 IRR soldiers. When General Byrne last talked to you, we were up about 10,000 more. So, we have 65,000 IRR soldiers right now. They represent a pool of trained, experienced professionals that we call upon in times of war and national emergency. Their knowledge and skill make them an invaluable asset to our nation, and we're tremendously proud of our IRR soldiers and their contribution to the total Army.

Now, that's a recap of basically what General Byrne said. I want to do some myth-busting right now.

Myth 1: "We've never used the IRR before now." Actually, IRR soldiers have been making a contribution for a long time. Beginning with the Berlin crisis in 1961, we had 38,827 IRR soldiers mobilized by the Army, and this was the largest mobilization of the IRR to date. In the late '60s during the Vietnam era, we had 16,092 IRR soldiers - I'm sorry, thank you, 1,692 IRR soldiers who were called up into 42 mobilized Reserve units. Thirty-five of those units deployed to Vietnam, an additional 1,060 IRR soldiers were mobilized to fill requirements in Active Component units.

During the Gulf War, 1990 to 1991, 20,277 IRR soldiers were mobilized, and of those 14,470 were deployed. So, you can see this is not the first time we've tapped the expertise of the IRR soldiers.

Myth 2: "There's a massive mobilization of the IRR underway." As I said earlier, there are 65,000 IRR soldiers. Since 9/11, seven years ago, we've published about 20,000 mobilization orders. That's about 31 percent of the IRR. Slightly less than 5,000 are mobilized today, and that's about 7 percent of the current IRR population.

Myth 3: "There's no point in using the official process to request a delay or exemption to orders, because almost everyone gets turned down." And I have got to tell you, this is - this is where my most heart-felt comments come. The delay and exemption process that we offer these soldiers is so critical - (audio interruption) - soldiers' ability to being delayed or exempted.

There is a misconception out there that soldiers need to have lawyers present their cases. That is untrue. The cases - once a soldier receives a mobilization order, they can request a delay or exemption.

There is a phone number on the orders, in his packet, that tells him who to call.

We have dedicated soldiers who are case managers, who process these delay or exemption cases. To date, we've had 1,100 soldiers ask for a delay. Nine-hundred and sixty of those have been granted; 87 percent of the delays have been granted. About 8,700 soldiers have asked for exemption. Almost 5,000 of those have been granted; and we have 407 cases right now that we're working. So 57 percent of all exemption cases have been granted to date. That's better than half.

My concern - and I want to explain this very carefully, when a soldier calls in, our case managers tell that soldier what kind of documentation he needs to send us so that we can adjudicate his case. A lawyer doesn't do it any better than the soldier does, and a lawyer doesn't help them get out of their case.

And I'm very concerned that some of our soldiers are spending thousands and thousands of dollars, when I can assure them that I personally look at every single case. It comes before me and I read the entire case, and I make a decision as to whether exempt or delay the soldier. So, I wish that they would all just take advantage of what we have to provide for them.

Myth 4: "The Army doesn't take care of IRR soldiers after they come home from Iraq or Afghanistan." Actually, the Army and the VA have a wide variety of programs in place to support all soldiers. This is one of the areas that I am really focusing this command on, is taking care of those soldiers once they come back.

That is another reason why we have musters on an annual basis. We want to call back our soldiers and make sure they are filling out their Post-Deployment Health Reassessments, because when they leave their deployment, they fill out and say, "I am in this medical condition," and then there is a post-deployment assessment which is done six months later. So we want to muster them and make sure they have done that health assessment.

I will tell you that in this last year we had musters, during calendar year '08 we found three soldiers who were suicidal, one of whom we got directly into the VA and got him help immediately. So, I am very proud to say that we do try very hard to take care of our soldiers, and the musters is the best way so far that we can actually touch these soldiers and give them the medical assistance they need.

There's also a Wounded Warrior program. We have approximately 252 Army Reserve soldiers in that. There are IRR soldiers who are wounded and still getting treatment for their medical issues. And there is - the latest new program is called the "Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program." At the 90-day mark, after an Army Reserve unit has come back from deployment, the soldiers are exempted from drills for 90 days. At the 90-day mark, they have a ceremony, and get the families together and have what they call a "reintegration drill."

It's now a requirement to send those IRR soldiers back to those units so they can participate, with their families, in this program. And it's very exciting because, to date, we haven't had a whole lot of the units call up to have our soldiers come back. And they've bonded with these units, and it's appropriate that they participate in their reintegration ceremony.

Myth 5: Vast numbers of IRR soldiers are failing to report to mobilization stations as ordered. We've had 779 cases of IRR soldiers failing to report as ordered to their mobilization stations.

We've discharged 354 of them for failure to report and we have 425 cases still under investigation. So if you calculate those numbers, that's 779 out of 20,000 soldiers. That's only 4 percent.

And myth number six: The Army is involuntarily mobilizing retirees. Some soldiers who have served not eight years, but 20 or more years, who are in a retired status, they served their full careers -- they've now volunteered to come back. We've had 2,832 retired soldiers apply to come back on active duty; 2,218 of them are qualified volunteers and 890 are in active duty right now. Thankfully, none of them have been killed in action, but hundreds of them are putting themselves in harm's way both in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The retired reserve, in case you are curious about that, consists of all soldiers -- officer and enlisted -- active duty, Reserve and National Guard who've been discharged after satisfactorily completing at least 20 years of military service and who are eligible to draw retired pay. There are 788,000 retire reserve soldiers at this time. Of that, 890 of them are on active duty. So one-tenth of 1 percent of the retired reserve is recalled right now. And that's not mobilized. That's recalled. They have volunteered to return to active duty.

I think that concludes the myth busting I wanted to do and I look forward to your questions.

MR. HOLT: Okay, thank you very much, ma'am.

I've got one right here: In your myth busting number six, you were talking about the retirees. And how many have volunteered to come back on -- what was the total number again? COL. GOOD: Two-thousand-eight-hundred-and-thirty-two have volunteered, but only 2,218 have been accepted. Some of them may be not medically qualified and things like that.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

COL. GOOD: And if I could, let me clarify: There are three categories of those retired soldiers. Category 1 is non-disability retired and they've retired less than five years and are under the age of 60.

Category 2, still non-disability retired and still more than five years -- I'm sorry -- more than five years retired and under the age of 60. And then Category 3, all of those other retirees who are not Cat. 1 or Cat. 2.

MR. HOLT: Okay, all right.

Jonas, you with us?

Q I sure am!

MR. HOLT: Okay, why don't you get us started.

Q Okay.

Colonel Good, thank you for taking the time to speak with us. And I actually come from this from sort of an interesting angle, because I was recalled to Fort Leonard Wood. I was let go for medical reasons, so I have sort of a firsthand encounter with this.

My question comes to Army utilization of recalled soldiers. I was seeking a delay so that I could finish university. I had about a year-and-a-half left. I'd already undergone language training, but it was made very clear at the recall that whatever skill set we might have acquired from the time we left, that we were going right back to our old positions. And in fact, some of the cadre we'd dealt with said that they had recently processed someone that since he'd been out had finished a degree in structural engineering and he was sent back in, enlisted as a MP, I believe.

COL. GOOD: That was his original military occupational specialty -- his original MOS?

Q Yes.

COL. GOOD: Yes. Those are -- all we can recall soldiers in is their MSO that they were trained on. Did I answer your question?

Q Well, I was saying, I mean, for people that were recalled and were looking to utilize whatever skill set they've learned in the interim, why has there -- at least when I was there, there is no sort of structure in place to allow them, you know, to allow them to be a much greater asset. I mean, I think a structural engineer would be a much better asset than an MP.

COL. GOOD: Well, that all depends on the needs of the Army. But if they aren't military qualified and trained with that particular MOS, we can't recall them as that.

See, when you leave active duty, you are a particular MOS and that's the MOS that we have in the database and that's what we have you qualified for. Now, if you wanted to qualify before you got mobilized and sent in the paperwork, then -- and we sent you to whatever course we needed to send you to -- then we could change your MOS. But it's only the MOS that you released from active duty with.

And the way it's done is we get a request for a certain package, a certain number of specialties, and we go to our database and we do a random calling of that particular specialty.

So if, for example, say it was five years ago and you had never -- the equipment that you were trained on before is no longer being used in the Army, then you would ask for an exemption, because you were not trained and then your case would be looked at. Does that make sense?

Q Yes.

COL. GOOD: Because we do have some that are very -- we have some in the IRR who've been in there since -- last time they were in active duty was early '90s, some late '80s. And some of them were on very technical equipment and we knew full well that there was no way that they would be effective and fill the Army's needs today. So we don't send them.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Well, Colonel, that brings up a question on the annual musters that you are doing. Would there -- would that -- is there an effort in place to address some of these changing skill sets at those musters?

COL. GOOD: Absolutely. At the musters, that's the time where not only do we look at your medical qualifications. If you've had other schooling and other training and we can get your MOS changed, we can do that. We can send you to another military school to make sure it fits more with your lifestyle -- absolutely!

We're here to take care of all the soldier's needs in the entire lifecycle at the musters. That would be a great time to bring that up.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

And I had an e-mail here that came in from Jason Seiger (sp), who was unfortunately unable to make this call this afternoon. But he has a question here that he wants to ask. It says: Given that it appears our military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan will be decreasing over the next year or so -- next few years -- will the Army be allowing IRR soldiers to return to civilian life after their one-year commitment of active duty?

That is to say, has the stop-loss policy been withdrawn to allow IRR's to complete their commitments and go home? COL. GOOD: I'm not aware of a stop-loss policy that he's talking about nor am I aware of a one-year commitment and go home.

The IRR soldier, when he's called up for his tour and he comes back and is demobilized, he's back in the IRR population or IRR pool unless he's completed his obligations. So I'm not quite sure what he means by going back to his civilian life. He's still in the Army Reserve in an IRR status if he still has part of his eight-year obligations remaining.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And then his mobilization order, I guess, predominately have been for 12 to 18 months in the past. So once those orders are over, he would return to whatever status he was prior to the orders.

COL. GOOD: Correct.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

All right, Jonas, anything else from you?

Q That should be it for now.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Well, I've got one of the other -- one question I've got, as for clarification, in your opening statement you mentioned that the soldiers inferred an eight-year obligation. Now, is that also -- when I joined the National Guard it was six-plus-two: a six-year obligation, plus a two-year -- and I suppose that would be in the IRR where you be inactive duty, yet subject to recall for two years past your six-year enlistment.

COL. GOOD: Correct. Now, there are different versions or different forms of the eight years. It all adds up to the eight years. So depending on if you spend three years on active duty, then you have five years in the Reserves.

MR. HOLT: Okay, okay.

COL. GOOD: And there's different categories of the Reserves. In some contracts, you sign that you will spend your time in a troop program unit, and that's called the -- that's basically an active Reserve status. One weekend a month, just like the National Guard, and then your two weeks in the summer and then you get mobilized with your unit if appropriate, and then a couple of years in the inactive, which is the IRR. So there are different combinations of all of those eight years.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And then also in the Reserves, of course, there's the IMA program. COL. GOOD: Yes. An IMA is an Individual Mobilization Augmentee. You are in the IRR to go into the IMA program. And that is where you augment an

active duty billet and you do two-weeks annual training, similar to an Army Reserve unit, only it's only on an individual basis.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right.

Okay, thank you very much.

And Jonas, one more time: Anything you've got there?

Q Am I the only one asking questions?

MR. HOLT: Yeah, yeah. There were some others that were supposed to be here, but for some reason we didn't make the connection.

Q Okay, well sure. I've got one more.

Colonel Good, when I was -- when I was there as part of the mobilization, there were a lot of people wondering why soldiers that had previously served, presumably been released under honorable conditions, because they were there again -- why in the mobilization process, we were led by drill sergeants and kept really in community housing. It was sort of a basic training redux and a lot of people were wondering about that. Were any reasons given for using that sort of environment?

COL. GOOD: You're talking about -- was that at the mobilization station? Do you know?

Q Yes. That was at Leonard Wood.

COL. GOOD: Okay. And how long ago was that?

Q That would have been 2005.

COL. GOOD: 2005, okay. It's a process of -- we kind of call "re-greening". We make sure that everyone has the basic military skills. So it is a process that all units go through and then the ones that are mobilized, we need to make sure that their skills are honed also. So it's a pretty generic kind of training that everybody does go through. Does that make sense?

Q Well, in a sense, but I'm still not entirely sure why it was sort of that same -- it was an attempt at that same sort of shock environment that you would put a brand new recruit through.

COL. GOOD: I can't give you any details on that, because I'm not responsible for the mobilization station. That's the active duty, so I really can't give you any reasons why -- on that. I can't give you any insight to that. Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: All right. And I'll just -- just for your information, I just got an e-mail from several people who said that they couldn't -- the access code that they were using wasn't allowing them in. So evidentially, we had some technical issues as far as our phone access for today.

So Colonel, I may end up having some -- once we get the transcript and the audio file posted on the net, we may have some follow-up questions from those who were trying to dial in and couldn't. So I will forward those along the Major Wan (sp), as they come in.

COL. GOOD: Okay.

MS. : And sir, Colonel Good has indicated she is willing to speak again to all these people who got locked out.

MR. HOLT: Okay, all right. We can do that as well. We'll have a look and see if we can reschedule. We'll get the transcript posted up and see where we are in follow up here, probably in another couple weeks or so.

COL. GOOD: Okay.

MS. : Well, thank you.

No, I'm very sorry to hear so many people got locked out.

MR. HOLT: I am too. I've got to find out exactly what was going on here, but I'll track that down and I'll be back with you as soon as I can.

COL. GOOD: Okay, thank you. Thank you for the opportunity.

MR. HOLT: Well, thank you, Colonel. We appreciate you being with us. Some really good information there in following up on what General Burn (sp) has mentioned to us before and we look forward to following up with you again.

COL. GOOD: Great, thanks.

Q Thanks.

Q Thank you, Colonel.

END.